

REMARKS

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OF

MR. T. BUTLER KING, OF GEORGIA,

ON

STEAM MAIL PACKET SERVICE:

DELIVERED

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE UNITED STATES,

JULY 19, 1848.



WASHINGTON:

J. AND G. S. GIDEON, PRINTERS.

1848.

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SPEECH.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, *July 19, 1848.*

Mr. KING, of Georgia, from the committee on Naval Affairs, having reported a joint resolution relative to Steam Navigation, addressed the House in explanation thereof as follows:

Mr. SPEAKER :

The resolutions which I have had the honor to report from the Committee on Naval Affairs propose, first, to direct the Secretary of the Navy to advertise for proposals for carrying the United States mail from either of the ports therein named that shall be ascertained to be most eligible, to Havre, in France, for a period of ten years, in five first-class steamers, capable, in all respects, of being readily converted into ships of war, and to be placed on the line during the first five years of the contract; 2d, to establish a similar line, for similar purposes, from one of the ports named in the United States to Antwerp, in Belgium, to extend to Gluichstadt, at the mouth of the Elbe, during such part of the year as the navigation of the North Sea may be considered safe; the two lines to consist ultimately of ten ships of the largest class; these proposals to be returned to this House at its next session for its consideration. The last resolution proposes to employ temporarily, and until this House shall have decided on the proposals to be submitted, the steamer United States, which has recently been constructed in New York, and is believed to possess all the qualities essential to the service.

The object of the establishment of these lines is, of course, to promote and increase our intercourse directly

with the continent of Europe. It will be perceived, on an examination of the map which I present for the inspection of the House, that the greater portion of our intercourse to and from the continent, so far as respects the transmission of letters and all mailable matter, and the conveyance of passengers, is conducted across the Island of Great Britain, the English Channel, and the North Sea; that there have been established twelve lines of steamers (the routes of which are traced) between Gluichstadt, at the mouth of the Elbe, Bremen-haven, Amsterdam, Antwerp, Ostend, Calais, and Havre, on the Continent; and Southhampton, Dover, London, Hull, and Edinburgh, in the Island of Great Britain, through which lines our own intercourse is maintained; and that it must be an object of great importance to this country, not only as far as practicable to promote and facilitate a direct communication with the Continent, but to avail ourselves of that communication to support and increase our own steam tonnage in time of peace, that it may be at command in time of war.

It is not my present purpose to go into an examination of this subject so far as to show the expediency or in expediency of establishing these lines of steamers. That would require a comprehensive view, not only of the extent of the foreign commerce of the United States with the Continent, but of their commercial regulations, and of the particulars in which it would be desirable to negotiate for changes or modifications in these regulations with respect to transit duties, and so forth, so as to promote and increase our intercourse with those States. When the proposals shall be sent in by the Secretary of the Navy, it will be proper to take up this whole subject, and present it clearly to the House and the country. My present object is to give some account of the rise and progress of ocean steam navigation, its present extent and condition, embracing some of the reasons and motives which have actuated me in the steps I have taken towards the establishment of an American steam marine, which shall be capable not only of maintaining our position in the carrying trade of the world, but shall give our own citizens a fair opportunity of competing successfully with their great commercial rivals; and, while they do this, with the aid and

under the patronage of the Government, supply a class of ships which shall be our surest defence in the event of war.

I will now proceed to state some facts connected with the rise and progress of British ocean steam navigation.

By act of Parliament, 7th William IV, chapter 3, all previous contracts entered into by the Post Office for the conveyance of the mails by sea were transferred to the Admiralty. Then commenced, under the auspices of the Government, the system of mail steam packet service, which has become so important a part of the mercantile marine, and which, in case of necessity, will constitute, so far as the United States are concerned, the most formidable portion of the British navy.

In the year 1838 the successful passages of the "Sirius" and "Great Western," from Liverpool to New York, established the practicability of ocean steam navigation, which had been gravely contested by some of the most scientific men of both hemispheres. The success of this experiment opened a new and vast field for enterprise. It presented to the commercial world the idea of celerity and certainty in the movements of commerce hitherto unknown. To those entrusted with the national defence it promised to render those vast expenditures required in naval armaments subservient to the purposes of commerce in time of peace.

In the year 1839 a contract was entered into with Mr. Cunard and his associates, for the conveyance of the mails from Liverpool, *via* Halifax, to Boston, in five steamers of the first class, for eighty-five thousand pounds, or about four hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars per annum. It was stipulated that they should be built under the supervision of the Admiralty, should be inspected on being received into the service, and certified to be capable, in all respects, of being converted into ships of war, and of carrying ordnance of the heaviest description. Various stipulations were entered into in this and other contracts of a similar character, which placed these ships under the control of the Government—thus in fact making them, to all intents and purposes, at the same time, a part of the mercantile and military marine of the country.

I pass over the eight trips made by these steamers in 1840, and present the following :

Statement of the probable amount received by the Cunard Line of Steamers, from passengers and for letters and papers, from 1841 to 1846, inclusive, and also of the value of, and duties paid on, package goods imported in said line during that period. It is founded on statements received in March, 1847, from the Boston Custom-house and Post Office.

In 1841, the number of passengers landed in Boston was 1,436;		
the passenger money for that year amounted to	\$172,320	
According to our estimate, the number who sailed from Boston to Liverpool is 1,293; the passenger money amounted to	-	168,090
The amount paid by the British Government for the transportation of the mails was	-	425,000
Making in that year, for these two items alone	-	\$765,410
In 1842, the number of passengers who landed in Boston was 1,004; the passage money amounted to	150,600	
The number of passengers for Liverpool was 904; passage money -	-	117,520
Amount paid for mail	-	425,000
		693,120
In 1843, the number of passengers landed in Boston was 1,146; passage money for them was	-	171,900
The number landed in Liverpool was 1,032; the passage money was	-	134,160
Add amount for carrying mail	-	425,000
		731,060
In 1844, the number of passengers landed in Boston was 1,590; passage money -	-	238,500
Passengers landed in Liverpool 1,431; passage money -	-	186,030
Received for mails	-	425,000
		849,530
In 1845, the number of passengers landed in Boston was 1,823; passage money to Boston	-	273,450
Passengers landed at Liverpool 1,641; passage money -	-	203,330
Paid for mail	-	425,000
		901,780
In 1846 there were ten trips made, and the number of passengers to Boston was 1,540; passage money -	-	231,000
To Liverpool the number was 1,386; passage money	180,180	
Paid for mail	-	425,000
		836,180
		\$4,777,080

The whole amount received by the Cunard line for six years, for these two items alone, therefore, is four millions seven hundred and seventy-seven thousand and eighty dollars.

The value of goods, including specie, and the amount of duties paid, were as follows.

In 1841 the value of goods was	-	-	-	-	-	\$769,684 00
Duties paid	-	-	-	-	-	73,809 23
In 1842 the value of goods was	-	-	-	-	-	1,730,770 00
Duties paid	-	-	-	-	-	120,974 67
In 1843 the value of goods was	-	-	-	-	-	9,300,632 00
Duties paid	-	-	-	-	-	640,572 05
In 1844 the value of goods was	-	-	-	-	-	4,443,695 00
Duties paid	-	-	-	-	-	916,198 30
In 1845 the value of goods was	-	-	-	-	-	4,026,332 00
Duties paid	-	-	-	-	-	1,022,992 75
In 1846 the value of goods was	-	-	-	-	-	4,444,999 00
Duties paid	-	-	-	-	-	1,054,731 75

The duties, it will be perceived, have increased from \$73,809 23 in 1841, to \$1,054,731 75 in 1846. The amount received for the transmission of the mail and passengers is entirely exclusive of that which they received for freight.

According to the estimates of the postmaster at Boston, the number of letters from Boston to Liverpool is 30,000, and the number of newspapers 20,000; and he says an equal number is sent in the Canada mails.

The following statement shows the amount which the *British Government* has received for postages on mailable matter carried in this line, the number of letters and papers is given as stated and estimated at the Boston post office, the rate of postage being that charged in the New York packets. It is estimated that these steamers carry an average of 60,000 letters and 40,000 newspapers every trip, and that the postages amount to an average of \$31,600.

In 1841 the steamers made 21 voyages, or 42 trips, which will give from this source on mail matter alone	-	-	\$1,327,200
In 1842 they made 21 voyages, which, according to the same rate, would amount to	-	-	1,327,200
In 1843 they made 20 voyages, and the amount received for the mail was	-	-	1,295,600
In 1844 they made 20 voyages, and the amount received for the mail was	-	-	1,295,600
In 1845 they made 21 voyages, and the amount received for the mail was	-	-	1,327,200
In 1846 they made 19 voyages, and the amount received for the mail was	-	-	1,264,000
Total amount for six years	-	-	7,836,800
Deducting from this sum the amount paid for the mail	-	-	2,550,000
It leaves a balance to the credit of the British Government of			\$5,286,800

If there is an error, it cannot be great enough to alter the general result. This shows that the British Government is not only repaid the amount disbursed, but that it receives a large amount of revenue from this source. In fact, it appears that the receipts would support *two more* lines at an equal cost.

The favorable results of this contract induced the Government in the year 1846 to enlarge it by adding four ships to run from Liverpool to New York, and to increase the compensation to one hundred and forty-five thousand pounds, or about seven hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars per annum. These last ships have just commenced their regular trips, and will, without suitable efforts on our part to compete with them, be amply supported, as their predecessors of the Boston line have been, by our commerce and intercourse with Great Britain.

In the year 1840 a contract was made by the Admiralty with the Royal Mail Steam-packet Company, at two hundred and forty thousand pounds sterling, or one million two hundred thousand dollars per annum, for fourteen steamers, to carry the mails from Southampton to the West Indies, the ports of Mexico on the Gulf, and to New Orleans, Mobile, Savannah, and Charleston. These ships are of the largest class, and are to conform in all respects, concerning size and adaptation to the purposes of war, to the conditions prescribed in the Cunard contracts. They are to make twenty-four voyages or forty-eight trips a year, leaving and returning to Southampton semi-monthly.

Another contract has recently been entered into, as I am informed, for two ships to run between Bermuda and New York. The West India line, in consequence of some disasters during the first years of its service, was relieved from touching at the ports of the United States; but, in the spring of last year, it was required to resume its communication with New Orleans, and is at any time liable to be required to touch at the other ports, on our own coast, which I have named. Thus it will be perceived that this system of Mail Steam-packet service is so arranged as not only to communicate with Canada and the West Indies, the ports on the Spanish main and the Gulf coast of Mexico, but also to touch at every important port in the United States, from Boston to New Orleans.

These three lines employ twenty-five steamers of the largest and most efficient description, where familiarity with our sea-ports and the whole extent of our coast would render them the most formidable enemies in time of war. It is scarcely possible to imagine a system more skilfully devised to bring down upon us, at any given point, and at any unexpected moment, the whole force of British power. More especially true is this with respect to our *Southern* coast, where the great number of accessible and unprotected harbors, both on the Atlantic and the Gulf, would render such incursions comparatively safe to them and terrible to us. And when we reflect that the design of this system is, that it shall draw the means of its support from our own commerce and intercourse, we should surely have been wanting in the duty we owed to ourselves and to our country if we had failed to adopt measures towards the establishment of such an American system of Atlantic steam navigation as would compete successfully with it. Foreseeing the results to which this new system must ultimately lead, I had the honor, at the extra session of 1841, to make to the House a report from the Committee on Naval Affairs, in which I took occasion to state the progress it had made, and to propose such action on the part of our Government as this new condition of things seemed to require.

The occasion of this report and the bill which accompanied it, proposing the establishment of a home squadron, was the belligerent aspect of our relations with Great Britain. The destruction of the steamer *Caroline*; the threatened execution in the State of New York of Alexander McLeod, who was charged with having participated in that affair; and the state of our negotiations with respect to the Northeastern boundary, all seemed to portend war at no distant day. To be prepared for any emergency which might arise, the station for the British North American fleet had been removed from Halifax to the Island of Bermuda; and the lines of mail steamers already mentioned had been established from Liverpool to Boston, and from Southampton to the West Indies. These measures seemed to me to demand some counteracting efforts on our part. The bill proposing the employment of a home squadron

was passed, and a resolution was appended to the report to which I have referred directing the Secretary of the Navy to advertise for proposals for the establishment of lines of mail steamers similar in all respects to the British, to run from some one or more of our own ports to such European ports as he might deem most expedient, and also for the establishment of a line from some one of our Northern ports to the ports of the Southern States. In fact, this resolution was designed to call into existence the mail packet service which has since been established. The idea of this system was, however, new to the country, and time was required to impress its importance on the public mind. In the month of May, 1846, I again called the attention of Congress to the subject in a report from the Committee on Naval Affairs. But it was not until the month of June of that year that a contract was made for the conveyance of the mails from New York to Bremen in four steamers of the first class; and on 3d March, 1847, an act was passed which required the Secretary of the Navy to enter into three contracts—first, for five ships to convey the mails between New York and Liverpool; secondly, for the conveyance of the mails from New York to New Orleans, to touch at Charleston, if practicable, and at Savannah, and Havana, with a branch line from the latter place to Chagres; thirdly, to contract for the transmission of the mail from Panama to Oregon, touching at the intermediate ports in California. On this line three steamers of a large class are to be employed. The same act authorized the construction of four war steamers of the largest size, and the joint resolution which I had the honor to report on the 4th of May last, from the Committee on Naval Affairs, proposes the establishment of steam communication from one of our ports in California to Shanghae and Canton, in China, by the employment of these four Government war steamers; and also a communication from the same port to the Sandwich Islands. This, I conceive, may be justly regarded as the American system of mail steam-packet communication, designed to rival and counteract that which has been established by Great Britain. Her system consists of the Atlantic lines to which I have alluded, and the following additional lines:

First. From England to the East Indies and China; contract made the 1st of January, 1845, with the Peninsula and Oriental Steam Navigation Company, for the employment of seven steamers, at one hundred and sixty thousand pounds sterling, or eight hundred thousand dollars per annum. This line passes from Southampton, via Gibraltar and Malta, to Alexandria, in Egypt; thence the route continues overland to Suez, at the head of the Red Sea, from whence the steamers again start, touching at Aden, Bombay, and at Point de Galle, in the Island of Ceylon; from whence they proceed to Singapore and Hong Kong. There is a branch line connecting with this from Point de Galle to Calcutta, touching at Madras.

Secondly. The Pacific line, from Valparaiso to Panama, touching at intermediate ports, on which four steamers are employed; contract made 1st of July, 1846. This line connects overland, from Panama to Chagres, with the West India line.

Thirdly. The lines which have already been described as running between Great Britain and the continent.

These, together with some lines of less importance, employ altogether eighty-seven steamers; besides which there are employed in what is called the home service twenty-eight steamers of a smaller class, making a grand aggregate of one hundred and fifteen steamships.

The ships employed in our mail packet service should be increased from time to time, as the state of our commercial intercourse and the carrying trade will justify; and I am inclined to the opinion, and believe I can demonstrate to this House, on the proper occasion, that we may with perfect safety establish two more lines, (those indicated in the resolution,) to be gradually enlarged to five ships each. It is highly probable, also, that other lines may be established between important points which have not been suggested. If, for example, we extend our communication by this means to the mouth of the Elbe, from which there is a railroad to Kiel, on the Baltic, it may be found expedient to run a line from the latter place to St. Petersburg. This arrangement would enable us to communicate with the capital of Russia, and other important points on the Baltic, in twenty days from New York.

In the year 1816, when the disasters which our commerce had suffered during the war which had just closed were fresh on the public mind, there seemed to be but one common sentiment in the country in favor of increasing the navy. It was apparent, that in any future contest which might arise, the great struggle would be upon the ocean; that, as we were rapidly becoming one of the first, and should soon be *the* first, commercial Power among the nations of the earth, a navy, in some degree at least, commensurate with the extent of our commerce, would be absolutely necessary for its protection; and that, aside from this, the very great extent of our coast on the Atlantic, the Gulf, and the Lakes, which no system of fortifications would render secure, would require naval armaments sufficiently powerful to harass and render insecure the approaches of an enemy, if not to defeat and destroy him.

With this view, Congress passed an act for the gradual increase and improvement of the navy, and one million of dollars was appropriated for that year. One million of dollars was also appropriated annually for the four subsequent years; and every year thereafter, until 1838, inclusive, there was appropriated five hundred thousand dollars: so that, during these twenty-three years, fourteen millions of dollars, besides the ordinary annual appropriations, were applied to the increase of the navy. The plan adopted was, to build ships of a large class—chiefly frigates and seventy-fours—erect houses over them at a very large expense, and allow them to remain in an unfinished state until the exigencies of the service might require them to be put into commission. In several instances, they were launched, and roofs thrown over them. It was supposed that those under cover in the yards, if left without caulking, would remain for an almost indefinite period uninjured by dry-rot. Time, however, proved that this expectation was not well founded, and that, in a few years, these vessels required extensive repairs, or almost to be reconstructed, before they could be launched or sent to sea. Those which had been placed in the water fared no better. They were subject both to wet and dry rot, and went to decay much sooner than they would have done if actually in commission. Under this system, as I have stated, our ships of the line

were built. The "Ohio" was constructed in 1820. She lay in dock until 1836, '37, and '38, during which years, before she had ever been at sea, she was thoroughly repaired, at a cost of \$253,846. This ship is also charged with repairs at Boston during the same three years to the amount of upwards of \$233,000.

The ship "North Carolina" was built in 1818 to 1820, at Philadelphia, and was completed at Norfolk in 1825, at a cost of \$431,852. She is charged with repairs at Norfolk, in the same year, of \$65,222 46. She is also charged with repairs at Norfolk, in 1835, only ten years afterwards, \$252,446 46: making total for repairs, after having been in service only ten years, \$317,628 92.

The ship "Delaware" was built at Norfolk in 1817 to 1820, at a cost of \$543,368. Her repairs cost in 1827-'8, \$70,105 27; in 1832-'3, \$127,690 62; and in 1836 to 1838, \$156,336 57; in 1841, \$99,650 78—being a total for repairs in fourteen years of \$453,783 04.

There has already been expended on the "Vermont" \$213,053 19; on the "Alabama" \$268,756 30; on the "Virginia" \$184,341 65; on the "New York" \$219,795 53; making a total of \$672,846 48—for ships of the line that have not been launched, and which will probably be destroyed by dry-rot before they will be required for service.

The ship "Pennsylvania" originally cost \$687,660 62, and, although never employed on sea service, she had, in 1841, cost in repairs \$34,625 90.

These are some of the fruits of the system adopted in 1816. I might go on and give other instances of expenditures equally wasteful, and results equally unprofitable. But I think these sufficient to show that we must adopt some other mode to obtain a naval force which shall be sufficient for our purposes in case of war. The old system, it will be seen, has this fatal and irremediable defect—whatever amount may be expended in the *construction* of ships, they will soon require an equal amount to keep them in *repair*, if placed in commission; and if allowed to remain on the stocks, or in the water, they will decay in a few years.

The plan for increasing the navy, which I propose to substitute for the one which we have so long and so unprofitably pursued, is, first, to encourage the establishment

by private enterprise, under the auspices of the Government, of as many lines of steam mail packets as our commercial intercourse will warrant and sustain. I have no doubt that we may employ in this way from 25 to 30 steamers of the largest class, which will be kept in repair by the contractors, and be at all times liable to be taken into the service of the Government at a fair valuation. It will be the interest of the contractors to adopt from time to time all the improvements which may be made in machinery and the means of propulsion. We shall avoid the expense of mistakes in construction and machinery. These vessels will contribute largely to the extension and increase of our commerce, and will be infinitely more efficient in protecting our coast in the event of war than all the fortifications we have constructed, or may construct, at twenty times their cost. But, as I do not suppose we shall acquire a force in this way entirely sufficient for our purposes, it is my intention at the next session of Congress to propose a measure to carry out the views which I presented to this House in a report from the Committee on Naval Affairs in June, 1846. That report recommended the construction of iron steamships, so modelled as to give the greatest practicable speed, and the machinery to be of the most perfect and powerful description. After having been tested as to speed and capacity for carrying their armament, my proposition was that they should be placed upon railways, painted, and protected by sheds from the weather. In this condition, they would remain, even for centuries if necessary, without decay or sensible deterioration. They could in a very few days, almost in a few hours, be placed in commission. Two or three ships a year, built in accordance with this plan, would, in the space of a few years, with a very gradual expenditure of money, which would not be felt by the Treasury, give us a force which, in connexion with our mail steamers afloat, would be sufficient to protect our commerce and seaboard in any emergency.

These are the two modes which I propose for the gradual increase of the navy. The mail packets will be commanded by naval officers—each carrying a sufficient number of midshipmen for watch officers—and thus a very considerable portion of the *personnel* of the service will be ac-

tively employed, and have the opportunity of acquiring the knowledge and skill requisite to the proper management of a steam navy.

I beg to observe that I have made no statement, nor do I propose to do so at this time, of my views with respect to our navy afloat and in commission, which has been and will continue to be employed in the general protection of our commerce in time of peace, and in carrying our flag to, and making it respected in, all parts of the world. I must, however, express my opinion that very great abuses have existed for many years past in that branch of the public service, and that it has been sustained at a cost to the country greatly disproportioned to the force employed, and that, if economically and properly administered, it may be increased and sustained at a cost far below the annual appropriations for the last twenty years. I think, however, it will be perceived, from the statements already made, that some other mode than that adopted in 1816 must be devised to provide such a gradual increase of our naval force as will enable us to look to it with any degree of confidence as a means of protection in time of war. It is not in accordance with the spirit of our institutions, or with the views of the people, to maintain in time of peace these large and expensive naval establishments, which have been the pride and boast of the monarchies of the old world. Yet our position among the nations of the earth, and the necessity of protecting our widely extended and increasing commerce, require that we shall adopt some plan which will enable us to be prepared for any change which may take place in our existing peaceful relations with the maritime Powers of Europe.

In the discussions which have been occasioned by the appropriation asked to meet the contracts for this mail service, it has been argued that it is quite unnecessary for the Government to contribute in any degree to sustain it; that private enterprise, if left untrammelled "by Government schemes and legal enactments," would sustain itself against all foreign competition. To show the fallacy of this reasoning, it is only necessary to state a few facts connected with the recent voyage of the steamer "United States" to Liverpool. The price of freight from Liverpool to New

York, as established by the Cunard line, is seven pounds sterling per ton, and the price of passage thirty pounds per head. While the "United States" was in dock at Liverpool, the agents of the Cunard line, to prevent freight and passengers going in her, reduced the price of freight by the "Hibernia" to four pounds per ton, and to two pounds ten shillings by the "Niagara," and they offered to take passengers as low as twelve pounds each. It was announced at the same time, in Harnden's Liverpool Circular, that the old rates would be resumed immediately after the departure of the American ship. The British line, sustained by the Government, was enabled to adopt this course with impunity in competition with a ship sustained by individual enterprise alone. And it must, I suppose, be admitted that our citizens, if not aided in undertakings of this sort by their own Government, would be quite incapable of competing for any considerable time with so powerful an opposition. This being the case, it must be apparent to any one who will investigate the subject that in a very short time the most valuable portion of our carrying trade would pass into the bottoms of these British mail packets. The steamer "United States" is strictly a private enterprise. She has proved herself the fastest ocean steamer in the world, and has a greater capacity for the accommodation of passengers and for carrying freight than any commercial steamer hitherto constructed; yet, unaided by the Government, and having such powerful rivals to contend against, she must prove a ruinous undertaking to the owners. It was in view of this state of facts that I offered my second resolution.